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**Testimony of Vikki Cooper, Deputy Corporation Counsel, Office of Legal Affairs
Support of Bill No. 245**

An Act Concerning Municipal Recovery of Moneys Paid on Behalf of Displaced Tenants

Good afternoon Senator Coleman, Representative Tong, Senator Kissel, Representative Reimbias and members of the Judiciary Committee. I am Vikki Cooper, Deputy Corporation Counsel for the City of Stamford and I appreciate the opportunity to submit testimony in support of Bill No. 245.

In the past few years as counsel for the City of Stamford, I have worked closely with the City's Director of Mandated Services, who is also the City's relocation officer. Each year, the City of Stamford, which is one of the largest municipalities in this state, has a significant number of residents displaced from their homes due to code enforcement activities, and those displacements almost always involve relocation assistance under the Connecticut Uniform Relocation Assistance Act ("URAA").

Connecticut General Statutes § 8-270a as currently drafted does not expressly allow municipalities to seek reimbursement of temporary housing fees incurred as a result of the placement of residents in hotels/motels. The City of Stamford does not own any properties that can be used to house displaced residents, and that presents a significant challenge when displacements occur. For example, if a family of 5 lives in an apartment that is declared uninhabitable and the residents seek relocation assistance, the City must provide temporary housing to the family until they are able to secure permanent housing.

Often, it is quite difficult to secure permanent housing for displaced families in a timely fashion. Family income, credit history and lack of affordable housing are all factors that can significantly delay the process. As a result, the City is sometimes required to place families in multiple hotel rooms for days, weeks and possibly months until permanent housing is obtained. The City then presents the landlords with hefty bills seeking reimbursement for payments made under the URAA including hotel/motel fees. Depending on the amount, the landlords will either make prompt payment or altogether refuse to reimburse the City because of the hotel/motel fees incurred. The landlords or their counsel usually argue that the URAA does not authorize or require reimbursement for hotel and/or motel fees.

Connecticut courts have made clear that municipalities cannot engage in code enforcement activity and simply walk away from displaced families. The City understands its responsibility and fully intends to continue providing assistance. The proposed changes to Bill No. 245 will enable the City to seek reimbursement for temporary housing payments made to hotels and/or motels and clearly shift the financial burden to the landlords that have permitted their properties to fall into a state of disrepair and/or rented illegal apartments. The landlords should not be allowed to escape financial responsibility for providing substandard or illegal housing, and the City's taxpayers should not be required to carry such a tremendous financial burden. Accordingly, I urge you to approve Bill No. 245.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today.